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The S.T.O.P. Guide

A gentle pause for moments that feel overwhelming

When emotions run high, it can be hard to know what to do next. S.T.O.P. can help you create a little space between what you feel and how you respond. You don't have to make the feeling disappear—just slow things down enough to choose your next step.

S — STOP

Pause before reacting.

If it's safe to do so, stop what you're doing for a moment. You don't have to respond, decide, or fix everything right now.

What was I about to do or say?

T — TAKE A BREATH

Give yourself a moment to arrive in the present.

Notice one or two comfortable breaths. Let your exhale be gentle and unforced. If focusing on breathing doesn't feel helpful, notice your feet on the floor or the chair supporting you.

What do I notice in my body now?

O — OBSERVE

Notice what is happening, without judging yourself.

Inside: What feelings, thoughts, urges, or body sensations are here? Outside: What happened, and what do I know for sure? Try to separate what you know from what you fear or assume.

What am I noticing internally and externally?

P — PROCEED WITH INTENTION

Choose a next step that supports you.

Ask yourself what matters in this moment and what response is likely to help. You might take a break, ask for support, set a boundary, reply later, or take one small practical step. You can still feel upset and choose thoughtfully.

What is one helpful next step—and why?

A QUICK CHECK-IN

"What am I feeling? What might I need? What response will help me move forward in a way I can feel good about?"

S.T.O.P. isn't about ignoring your feelings or forcing yourself to calm down. It's about making room to respond with a little more awareness and care.

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For reflection and educational purposes only; this guide is not a substitute for individualized mental health care. If you are in immediate danger, prioritize getting to safety and contacting appropriate emergency support.